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General Assembly
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Official Records

80th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 22 April 2009, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. . . . . (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Agenda item 122 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/63/725/Add.4)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like, in keeping with established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/63/725/Add.4, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in documents A/63/725 and addenda 1 to 3, Cape Verde has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in this document?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/63/L.69, circulated under sub-item (d) of agenda item 49, "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind".

Members will recall that at the 2nd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2008, the General Assembly decided to allocate this sub-item to the Second Committee. In order for the General Assembly to proceed expeditiously with the consideration of the draft resolution A/63/L.69, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to consider sub-item (d) of agenda item 49 directly in plenary under heading B, "Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences"?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): May I further take it that the General Assembly agrees to proceed immediately to the consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 49?

As I see no objection, we shall now proceed accordingly.

Agenda item 49 (*continued*)

Sustainable development

(d) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind

Draft resolution (A/63/L.69)

The President: I am very pleased to preside over this meeting to consider and take action on the draft resolution entitled "International Mother Earth Day" (A/63/L.69). I wish to acknowledge the presence of my

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09-30962 (E)

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dear friend the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma. As we all know, Bolivia has taken the lead in bringing this draft resolution before the General Assembly, and we are grateful for the personal attention that His Excellency President Morales has given this important initiative.

The proclamation of 22 April as International Mother Earth Day is an acknowledgement that the Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance throughout our lives. It also recognizes our responsibility, as called for in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humankind. "Mother Earth" is a common expression for our planet in many cultures. It reflects the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit.

The draft resolution has been authored by the Plurinational State of Bolivia and is also sponsored by Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chile, China, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mongolia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines, Portugal, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Seychelles, Somalia, Spain, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Since the issuance of document A/63/L.69, the following countries have joined the list of sponsors of the draft resolution: Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belize, Eritrea, Finland, Germany, Grenada, Guyana, Jordan, Maldives, Myanmar, Peru, Slovenia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

This is truly a wonderfully broad endorsement.

The proclamation of 22 April as International Mother Earth Day aims to invite States, the United Nations and the rest of the intergovernmental system, organized civil society and other stakeholders to observe the Day each year. It provides a timely opportunity to raise public awareness around the world of the challenges that we face regarding the well-being of the planet and all the life it supports.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/63/L.69, entitled "International Mother Earth Day". May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/63/L.69?

Draft resolution A/63/L.69 was adopted (resolution 63/278).

Address by Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to welcome the decision today, 22 April 2009, by the United Nations to designate this day as the International Day of Mother Earth. As Governments, Presidents and representatives of the States that make up the United Nations, we have an enormous responsibility towards life and towards humankind. We know we have a role to play, a task to carry out and a responsibility, as Governments, to work for equality for our peoples, for unity and for dignity. Above all, we must work for humankind itself, because, in recent years and decades, we have seen the ongoing and deep damage done to Mother Earth. That is why this initiative of the national Government to designate one date, 22 April, to pay tribute to Mother Earth is, of course, not a festival but a day of deep reflection on the planet Earth.

We recall that, in past centuries, there was a continuous struggle for human rights. The major social movements battled in various continents and countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when human rights were still not recognized under international law. Thanks to the struggle of the peoples of North

America, Europe and all continents, the rights of a few and the slavery of many were recognized.

However, countries are constantly providing for human rights in their constitutions. I would say that the past century, the twentieth, was the century of human rights. After many struggles waged and demands issued in various regions and continents, human rights were finally recognized. In the twentieth century, civil and political rights were recognized from 1948 on. In 1966, economic, social and cultural rights were recognized. Sixty years ago, human rights were not respected throughout the world. What would human rights be today if they had not been recognized?

But 60 years ago they were recognized, and now we are convinced that, with today's declaration of International Mother Earth Day, planet Earth, Mother Earth, has also won her rights. And this new century, the twenty-first, should be the century of Mother Earth's rights. The decision we have taken today, under the leadership of the President of the General Assembly, is important. It is a singular, historic and unprecedented event for humankind, and those who have decided to support this great initiative will go down in history, the new history of awakening humankind.

That is why I reiterate once again that the twenty-first century is the century of the rights of Mother Earth and of all living beings. If we are to live in harmony with nature, we need to recognize that not only we human beings have rights, but that the planet does as well. Animals, plants and all living beings have rights that we must respect. What is happening to us now with climate change is the direct result of not respecting the rights of Mother Earth. The United Nations must ensure that the rights of Mother Earth and of all living beings are respected. The great challenge of the United Nations in the twenty-first century is to be aware of and watch over the rights of everyone and everything.

I know that this task will not be easy. Many people, in particular certain lawyers — forgive me for saying so — will say that only human beings have rights. In our view, it is difficult to accept that. While some human beings believe themselves to be at the centre of the world and the universe, I also know that, in the end, reason, good sense and reality will prevail.

Another important thing that I would like to point out is the importance of coexisting with nature, because human life is not possible without Mother Earth. Every day, at least in the mountains of the Andes region, we see our mountains losing their snowcaps. Our lakes are drying up. The islands are beginning to disappear. That is serious for humankind.

But I would also like to recall that in Bolivia, in particular among the local indigenous peoples that I am familiar with, Mother Earth is sacred to life. That is why we undertake sacred rituals of tribute to our rivers, forests, lakes and animals and have many tunes to express our respect for Mother Earth. I am convinced that Mother Earth is more important than humankind, and therefore the rights of Mother Earth are as important as those of any human being.

I would ask the representatives of the countries that comprise the United Nations to consider that Earth would have no problems if there were no human beings, but human beings would not be human beings without Mother Earth. I greatly regret our current, ongoing plight. The problems of the so-called financial, energy and food crises are the results of human beings' failure to respect planet Earth. I therefore wish to tell the President and members of this Assembly and our 192 Governments that our challenge is to agree on a universal declaration of the rights of Mother Earth. To contribute to that task, I would like to propose four rights of great importance to humankind.

First is the right to life, which means the right to exist. It is the right of no ecosystem, species, animal, vegetable, sea, river or lake to be eliminated or pushed to extinction by the irresponsible behaviour of human beings. We human beings must recognize that Mother Earth and all living beings have a right to exist and that our rights end when we set off the extinction or elimination of nature.

Second is the right of regeneration for the planet's biocapacity. Mother Earth must be able to regenerate its biodiversity. Human activity on the planet and its resources cannot be unlimited. Development cannot be infinite. There is a limit, and that limit is the capacity of animal and vegetable species, forests, water sources and the very atmosphere to regenerate themselves. It is more important to produce oxygen than carbon dioxide. If we human beings consume and, worse still, destroy more than Mother Earth can replace and recreate, we will slowly kill our home. We will gradually poison our planet, all human beings and ourselves.

Third is the right to a clean life. That means the right of Mother Earth to live without pollution, because not only we humans, but also the fish, animals and trees have the right to live well. The Earth itself has the right to live in a clean environment, free of poisons and toxins.

Fourth is the right to harmony and balance with and among all and everything. It is the right to be recognized as a part of a system in which each of us and everything is interdependent in the right to live in balance with human beings.

Millions of living species live on our planet, but only we human beings have the capacity and consciousness to control our own evolution in order to promote harmony with nature.

Until now, human beings have been prisoners of development capitalism, which states that man is the sole owner of the planet. Now it is time to recognize that the Earth does not belong to us. It is the other way around: we belong to the Earth, and it is our mission in the world to watch over the rights, not only of human beings, but of Mother Earth and of all living beings.

In conclusion, I would like everyone to say with me, jallalla Pachamama — long live Mother Earth!

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): This is a very important day for me, and personally speaking, I am very happy with the resolution that we have just adopted. I wanted to express my happiness by putting on my best suit. I am very proud of this suit, because it is the dress of my homeland — Latin America — and a gift from President Evo Morales.

(*spoke in English*)

I am very pleased that we have adopted this historic resolution that establishes International Mother Earth Day. I wish to thank President Evo Morales Ayma for his inspiring words and for honouring the Assembly with his presence today. He deserves our congratulations for making our concerns about our beleaguered planet a bigger part of public discourse. I thank representatives for their insightful interventions and for having collaborated in expediting the approval of the resolution.

I believe the Assembly's adoption of International Mother Earth Day has special significance at this point in our human odyssey. As scientists have pointed out, we are approaching, and may have already reached, a tipping point at which the damage that we are doing to the environment is irreversible. We may face a future of inexorable decline as we destroy the fragile ecosystems that support all life on the planet. The question before us is how to slow this decline or, in the best of scenarios, how to reverse it and return our planet to good health.

We are also approaching a tipping point in our collective awareness of the terrible harm our species is inflicting on dear Mother Earth. We are now aware of the miraculous intricacy of our land and marine biodiversity, as well as its fragility. Two years ago, this noble body declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity as part of the effort to slow the horrendous rate of loss of our planetary health and wealth. Still, we continue to squander our natural abundance in the name of a quasi-religious faith in profit and idolatry of the marketplace. The unfolding economic and financial crisis must be seen not only as a policy failure, but as a warning that our hyperconsumption, unfettered greed and obsessive accumulation of power and dominance have no future if we are to survive.

The Assembly is sending a special message of hope with the proclamation of Mother Earth Day. We are putting people and the well-being of the planet at the centre of our attention and recognizing responsible stewardship of our dwindling resources as a shared responsibility. Mother Earth, after all, nurtures and sustains life and our very humanity. It is only right that we, as sisters and brothers all, take care of Mother Earth in return.

Let us become good stewards once again. Let us listen to the wisdom of indigenous peoples who, despite all odds, have sustained their profound links to nature. Let us support the billion small food producers who, with sustainable farming methods, can continue to provide us with healthy food and not be driven into abject poverty by unfair trade policies and rapacious agro-industries.

Our decision today marks one more symbolic step in changing the dominant mindset that has brought us

so close to self-destruction. This morning we have another opportunity to pause and reflect on this moment in history — its challenges and its opportunities.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 59.

Before adjourning this meeting, may I invite members to remain seated so that we may begin the informal segment to hear statements by Ms. Maude Barlow, senior adviser to the President on water issues, and Mr. Leonardo Boff, special invitee of the President of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.